

Citizens Project  
2009 Public Policy Issues to Monitor & Address - Draft

Within our allowable limits, Citizens Project promotes public policy in support of equal rights, religious freedom and civic engagement. We rely on our partner organizations in Denver to keep us abreast of state legislative proposals, and our primary lobbying activity is mobilizing our Activist Network to write letters and make calls to their legislators. For local issues we may get more involved on a case-by-case basis. This report contains potential policy proposals that CP may want to advocate for or against. Staff consults the board on these issues to ensure they match our mission and fit with the Strategic Plan.

## **Potential State Legislative Proposals**

### *1. Designated Beneficiary*

This is a new approach to legal issues for domestic partnerships. It would provide the legal framework to designate a legal beneficiary for any state-regulated benefit or authority. It would include end-of-life issues, workers compensation, state employee benefits. It's unique to anything done by other states. Fiscal note.

### *2. The Civil Rights Division and Civil Rights Commission Sunset Review*

The state legislature must act to continue these through passing a bill. Committees are rarely abolished through this process and generally undergo fiscal changes. A continuation report has been submitted that recommends changes for improvement.

### *3. Remedies for Employment Discrimination*

Although an employment nondiscrimination law was passed in 2007 that includes sexual orientation, there are almost no "remedies" or penalties for discrimination under this law. There may be a proposal to institute the same remedies as are available to claimants under the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity laws, which do not currently cover sexual orientation. This would have a "fiscal note" meaning a cost, which makes it a tough battle this year.

### *4. State Employee Group Benefits*

Would define (for the first time in state law) the term domestic partner and allow state employers to include domestic partners in group policies (such as health insurance).

### *5. Public Restrooms*

There may be legislation from the right regarding sexual harassment and gender identity in public restrooms following on the hysterical claims made by Focus on the Family about last year's anti-discrimination law.

### *6. Voting Rights / Election Reforms*

Although our Strategic Plan specifically de-prioritized these issues for significant staff time, very little resources could be put into activist alerts on these.

- Photo ID - We expect a bill to require a photo ID to vote
- Proof of Citizenship – we expect a bill to require proof of citizenship to register.

Both would unnecessarily disenfranchise legal citizens.

- Election Day Registration – many states offer it, there may be a proposal this year for CO.
- All-mail elections - There may also be a proposal to allow all-mail elections in even years

(they are currently allowed for odd/off year elections.) The county clerks support this move but our partner organization Colorado Common Cause feels more research may be needed to ensure this does not have negative unintended consequences.

- Nonpartisan Election Administration - there may be an attempt to separate the work of running elections from the partisan jurisdiction of the Secretary of State, though little legal work has yet been done on this idea.

#### *6. Immigration*

Since CP has little historical involvement with this equal rights issue, staff is not currently tracking these. However, we could decide to send activist alerts on them. There are several possible proposals including a tuition equity bill that would allow equal access (in-state tuition at least) to higher education for undocumented graduates of Colorado high schools.

### **Potential Local Policy Proposals**

#### *1. Council Pay*

John Weiss at the Independent, may be proposing an increase in council pay for the city council to place on the April ballot.

#### *2. Human Relations Commission*

Joe Barrera and a few others have been meeting with city manager to craft a proposal, with no teeth, for a revived Human Relations Commission (HRC)

#### *3. Nondiscrimination Ordinance & Civil Rights Commission*

We stopped pushing this but there are some continuing discussions in light of the HRC discussions.

#### *4. Equal Benefits for partners of gay and lesbian City Employees*

Lots of folks, including us, would like to see this revived at the right time. No solid plans at this point.

#### *5. Repeal Local TABOR*

The City Council is considering a recommendation from the citizens Sustainable Funding Committee to put this to the voters. It would eliminate duplication of state and local TABOR, and allow the city to accept federal funds above the current TABOR spending limits

#### *6. Reauthorize Colorado Springs property tax*

Another proposal from the citizens Sustainable Funding Committee, to fund economic development activities.

#### *7. \$1.2M TABOR Override*

Another proposal from the citizens Sustainable Funding Committee, to allow the city to retain up to \$1.2M in revenues above the TABOR cap.